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SUBJECT: THREE PLUS ONE UPDATE

REF: SECSTATE 141216

Classified By: DCM Michael J. Fitzpatrick; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Pol/econ chief met October 11 with the MFA's Director of Special Affairs, Minister Victor Hugo Pena, pursuant to reftel. Pena indicated that the Paraguayan government is open to expanding the 3 plus 1 agenda, but asked that Post formalize its request via diplomatic note. Pena demonstrated personal interest in including critical infrastructure program (CIP) issues, financial crimes, document fraud, and arms and drug trafficking in the agenda. Specifically, Pena said Paraguay was interested in CIP issues and would like to engage Brazil on their shared marijuana trafficking challenges. (NOTE: At Paraguay's request, the OAS' CICTE is sending two CIP consultants to Paraguay October 24-27. END NOTE). Pena noted that Brazil and Argentina would likely be the deciding factors on expansion of the agenda.

¶2. (C) Pena said the Paraguayans are tentatively planning to host the 3 plus 1 meeting December 19. Pol/econ chief expressed concern regarding a date so close to the holidays and asked Pena if Argentina and Brazil had agreed to that date. Pena said the Brazilians expressed similar concerns. He agreed to consult with Foreign Minister Ramirez regarding an earlier December date, but admitted it would be difficult for Paraguay to host an event prior to the December 16 Colorado Party primary, both because his government would be distracted by the primary and because the 3 plus 1 would likely be politicized. Pena said the alternative would be to postpone the meeting until February or March 2008.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Post will send the MFA a diplomatic note requesting expansion of the 3 plus 1 agenda. Based on Pena's comments, it seems Paraguay may be willing to consider the expansion, although higher-level political interference could cause a change in course. In any case, it seems likely that the meeting may be pushed into early 2008. With the negative political reaction to recent attempts to pass anti-terrorism legislation, Pena's instincts that the meeting could be used for political gain during the run-up to the December Colorado Party primary and again before the April national elections are probably spot on. END COMMENT.

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Fitzpatrick